



April 3, 2019

Christina Paxson, President  
Office of the President  
Brown University  
Box 1860  
Providence, RI 02912  
president@brown.edu

Dear President Paxson:

We write as chair of the advisory board, interim executive director, and incoming executive director, respectively, of the [Academic Engagement Network \(AEN\)](#), a national faculty organization consisting of over 660 faculty members on more than 220 campuses across the United States. AEN seeks to counter the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement on campus, defend campus free speech and academic freedom, promote robust discussion of Israel in the academy, and respond to antisemitism on campus when it occurs.

We write to express our deep appreciation for your resolute statement to the Brown community on March 22, responding to a student referendum in which 69% of voting students supported “divest[ing] all stocks, funds, endowment and other monetary instruments from companies complicit in human rights abuses in Palestine and establish a means of implementing financial transparency and student oversight of the University’s investments.”

In particular, we fully agree with your statement that “Brown’s endowment is not a political instrument to be used to express views on complex social and political issues, especially those over which thoughtful and intelligent people vehemently disagree” and share your concern that “divestment would polarize the Brown community and detract from the inclusive, intellectually-vibrant community we aspire to be.” We also are thankful for your prior opposition to the BDS movement, which seeks to curtail academic freedom, hinder intercultural exchange and understanding, and single out one nation above all others for condemnation and ostracism.

We understand that you are currently facing pushback from some quarters – including, disappointingly, a number of faculty members at Brown – for your stance. Please know that the Academic Engagement Network supports you fully, precisely due to your defense of dialogue, engagement, and the core values of academia.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signature of Mark G. Yudof in black ink.

Mark G. Yudof  
Chair, Advisory Board

Handwritten signature of Michael Atkins in blue ink.

Michael Atkins  
Interim Executive Director

Handwritten signature of Miriam F. Elman in black ink.

Miriam F. Elman  
Incoming Executive Director